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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR AF/SPG, PRM, DS/IP/AF AND DS/DSS/ITA,
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SUBJECT: DARFUR - A CARJACKING A DAY KEEPS NGOS AWAY

REF: KHARTOUM 0878

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SUMMARY

(SBU) Carjackings present the greatest security risk to humanitarian operations in Darfur, according to the UN. Between January 2006 and April 2007, the UN received reports of 159 carjackings in Darfur, with a surge in attacks since December. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the primary target, and humanitarian staff are frequently abducted for several hours before being released. The loss of vehicles and communications equipment has forced reductions and suspensions of relief activities on several occasions. UN agencies, donors, and NGOs are taking steps to revise security procedures, provide additional training, and establish precautionary measures, yet carjackings remain a serious threat to the humanitarian community. (End cuMm`rynQ
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iQ#Q5:FPyLpl XQ incidents takarms fire, with shots being fired at the targeted vehicle in a quarter of reported incidents. However, 28 percent of carjackings occur in the vicinity of a home or office, highlighting the importance of security measures and vigilance in all areas. Nearly all vehicles targeted are Landcruiser Buffalo or Toyota pickup trucks. NGOs, including many USAID-funded organizations, are the primary target. While humanitarian staff tend not to be harmed, temporary abductions are becoming increasingly common.

12. (SBU) The suspected perpetrators include members of the Sudan Liberation Army factions under Minni Minawi and Abdul Wahid, Arab militia, unaffiliated armed bandits, and possibly trans-Sahelian crime networks. The UN notes that carjackings tend to emerge wherever humanitarian organizations are operating, although distinct patterns are apparent in each Darfur state. In North Darfur, most carjackings have occurred in and around El Fasher, while incidents in South Darfur are exclusively in remote locations. Both urban and rural areas are affected in West Darfur.

DEMAND FOR STOLEN VEHICLES

¶3. (SBU) The stolen vehicles and accompanying communications equipment are in demand from two sources, namely armed opposition groups and growing demand from markets in Chad. UN agencies and NGOs report that stolen aid vehicles are often handed off to a second group, in Saraf Omra or other locations in Darfur, before heading towards Chad. The vehicles are then sold to buyers from Chadian armed opposition groups, Sudanese armed opposition groups, or potentially other regional armed opposition groups. UN security officials believe that the recent trend of keeping staff in the vehicle for two to three hours after stealing the vehicle is a strategy to delay reporting of the incident and give the carjackers more time to leave the area. Unlike carjackers intending to sell the vehicles in Chad, other armed groups, primarily SLA and Arab militias, do not often abduct staff members.

¶4. (SBU) In a May 14 meeting, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that 50 percent of all carjacking incidents in Darfur in the past four months have been perpetrated by SLA/Minawi forces, meaning that the vehicle was either stolen from or ended up in an SLA/Minawi-controlled area. OCHA urged donors to pressure SLA/Minawi leadership to stop stealing vehicles and endangering humanitarian staff.

¶5. (SBU) The current carjacking trend, which generally involves the theft of vehicles and communications equipment but not usually theft of personal assets or physical attacks, indicates that the perpetrators intend to obtain assets and not to disrupt humanitarian

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operations. However, NGOs are concerned that assailants may be moving towards future abduction of international staff for ransom. In recent meetings, NGOs reported that assailants have discussed possibly abducting an expatriate staff member for ransom during two recent carjackings. If carjackings begin to be motivated by intent to collect ransom for staff members, the impact on aid agencies will be devastating.

IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

¶6. (U) The impact of carjackings is already being felt as several NGOs have had to reduce or suspend humanitarian operations following the loss of vehicles and communications equipment. In Gereida, South Darfur, the majority of relief organizations evacuated staff and closed operations following an unusually violent incident in December. In North Darfur, carjackings have repeatedly led to suspended health activities in Tawila locality (REFTEL). In addition, multiple NGOs have temporarily suspended operations in response to carjackings involving harassment or detention of staff.

SECURITY INITIATIVES

¶7. (U) In response to the escalating threat of carjackings, the UN, in collaboration with RedR, is training Darfur-based aid workers in carjacking avoidance and survival skills and is tracking incidents in order to analyze the larger trends. In addition, USAID and other donors are reviewing security protocols, NGO preparedness measures, and potential donor coordination mechanisms to support the safety and security of partner organizations. In May, OCHA conducted a safety training workshop, emphasizing procedures to avoid carjacking situations and survival tactics, for NGOs in Darfur. As this training only occurred in El Fasher, further training in El Geneina and Nyala are needed.

RECOMMENDATION

¶8. (U) USAID strongly encourages partners to review vehicle selection given the perpetrators' preference for Landcruiser Buffalos or Toyota pickup trucks.

